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House Votes Renewed Aid to Savimbi

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The Democratic-controlled House handed President Reagan an important foreign policy victory yesterday, voting to continue covert U.S. aid to the guerrilla forces of Jonas Savimbi fighting the Marxist government of Angola.

More than 60 Democrats, the bulk of them from the South and border states, voted with a solid bloc of Republicans to delete a section from the intelligence authorization bill that would have made future aid to the Angolan rebels subject to passage of a joint resolution of approval by Congress.

The effect of passage of the amendment striking this section, which was approved by a vote of 229 to 186, is to allow continuation of covert aid. Secret aid is not routinely subject to votes in Congress.

Rep. Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.), chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, said the vote was largely the result of election-year pressures on lawmakers who fear campaign charges that they are ignoring the communist threat.

"It's very tough, as we approach an election, to take on the argument you're not fighting communism," he said. "That's what we had to do."

In January, the Reagan administration notified the congressional intelligence committees that it planned to funnel covert aid through the CIA to Savimbi's rebel forces, known as UNITA, or the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola. This formal notification was all that was necessary to begin the flow of covert aid, estimated to involve up to $15 million this year.

Congress set the stage for the U.S. role in Angola last year when it repealed the so-called Clark amendment, named for former senator Dick Clark (D-Iowa), which barred U.S. aid to any of the forces involved in Angola's long civil war.

Savimbi, who is strongly supported by the white minority government of South Africa, is a charismatic guerrilla leader who has become a hero of conservatives in the United States. But in yesterday's debate, Hamilton, architect of the section to halt covert aid, described Savimbi as a "very dubious ally" and a political opportunist.

Hamilton and other opponents of aid to Savimbi argued that administration policy in Angola firmly aligned the United States with South Africa, diluting the impact of the recently enacted measure that would impose new economic sanctions against the Pretoria regime. They also asserted that support for Savimbi will damage U.S. interests throughout black Africa, and that Reagan had embarked on a major, covert shift in foreign policy without consulting Congress.

"The president may not be asking Congress to declare war, but he is asking us to become involved in a war," Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) said.

Savimbi's supporters, accusing Hamilton and the others of a backdoor attempt to reenact the Clark amendment, argued that only covert aid would be effective in the tangled battle for control of Angola.

"It's a tough world, and some things must be done in secret to be successful," said Rep. Bob Stump (R-Ariz.).

Several of the Democratic defections in the key vote involved Florida lawmakers, who are subject to considerable political pressure from the Cuban-American community. A large force of Cuban troops, dispatched by Cuban President Fidel Castro, is helping the Angolan government fight Savimbi's guerrillas.

Before approving the intelligence authorization bill by voice vote, the House also took another step in its election-year antidrug crusade. It adopted, by voice vote, an amendment that would make every employe of 10 government agencies covered by the bill subject to mandatory drug tests.

Rep. Clay Shaw (R-Fla.), author of the drug amendment, said it would be up to each agency head to decide which employes would be required to undergo drug testing.

The benefits and drawbacks of widespread testing of the federal work force have become a major controversy this year. In a report circulated this week, the General Accounting Office, for example, has concluded that mandatory testing "raises a constitutional problem." The "potential benefits are unmeasurable, while the estimated costs are significant," the GAO said, concluding that it opposed such a plan.

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